

# A Few Words on Negligent Discharges

By Capt Billy Edwards

**T**his *Ground Warrior* contains several articles reflecting an increase in negligent discharges, the firing action of a weapon, absent the intent of the one holding the weapon. A safety-survey team looked at negligent discharges during OIF II; all of them involved a violation of one or more of the four safety rules. For the few who read this magazine but are not familiar with these rules, here they are:

- Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.
- Never point your weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot.
- Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire.
- Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.

Negligent discharges are not a problem isolated within the Marine Corps. The Army also is seeing more with the increase in operations tempo. Negligent discharges are easily preventable, and all Marines are trained on the problem. Marines are taught weapons safety from the moment they are issued their first rifle in Boot Camp. The four safety rules are ingrained throughout boot camp and Officer Candidate School. These individual actions, when forgotten for just a moment, result in a negligent discharge.

Some may say mishaps and negligent discharges always will happen because you always will have Marines doing dumb things. Saying that humans make mistakes is a devil's-advocate view toward safety. What if your mistake costs the Marine Corps one of its own? What if it costs you a Marine in your section or squad,

or maybe one of your friends? Negligent discharges are preventable.

Marines not in a combat MOS may not be accustomed to handling weapons on a regular basis and some feel this fact accounts significantly for the recent increase in negligent discharges. However, the majority of negligent discharges are from infantry Marines, who are not a majority of the Corp and do handle weapons regularly. Marines specifically trained to close with and destroy the enemy, our best weapons handlers, are having more than their share of these mishaps.

I recently spoke with some members of an ordinary city police department and had an informal discussion on the subject. The department of roughly 150 police officers had two reported negligent discharges within the past six years, no injuries. This police force is small, similar in size to a Marine Corps rifle company. Marine rifle companies are going to Iraq, having more than two negligent discharges in six months, and some





having injuries. Police officers always have their weapons in their possession while on duty, and the weapons always are in Condition I. Police Officers do not check their weapons out of armories or clear them to go into a restaurant. I will continue to explore the comparisons in upcoming issues of *Ground Warrior*, but here are some initial areas of reflection. There are some lessons to be learned from the police:

Because police officers always are carrying a Condition I weapon, they know to treat it as if it were loaded. There is never a doubt as to the status of their weapon. The Marine Corps has consistent procedures for weapons handling. Following these procedures at all times is imperative to weapons safety, especially when we use them and need to clean them much more than police.

Carrying a loaded weapon all the time should make you more comfortable and familiar with it. Marines should not become complacent. Marines training need to be taking weapons to the field back in CONUS, even if they are support personnel. This will get Marines into

the proper mindset when it comes to weapons handling while deployed. Marine NCOs need to be diligent with monitoring clearing procedures, even in the infantry, and not allow their Marines to become complacent. Monitoring for complacency and getting Marines more time with their weapons may be the simple solution.

The Marine Corps Ground Mishap Investigation and Reporting Manual (P5102.1A) provides the current guidelines for reporting negligent discharges. One with injury or property damage is to be reported via the appropriate Safety Report (SAFEREP) from a Safety Investigation Board (SIB), in accordance with paragraph 4001.b. Any negligent discharge not causing injury or reportable damage is to be reported through a Hazard Report (HAZREP). The details of a Hazard Report are outlined in Chapter 5 of the order. Negligent discharges reported in the Marine Corps in fiscal year 03 and the first half of 04 follow. Marines may know of incidents that are not reflected in this list, due to a lack of reporting.

Reporting is important because it builds information about this recurring problem. With the reports, the Marine Corps can build statistics and lessons learned. The Marine Corps continues to address this problem at Safety Division and other standing safety boards. *Ground Warrior* also can serve as an outlet for weapons-handling training ideas and methods the individual Marine can use to maintain his vigilance with safety while still accomplishing the mission. I encourage Marines to write in about their perspectives and in-house discussions on this subject.

## Reported Fiscal Year 03 Negligent Discharges

**08 JAN** – Camp Lejeune, N.C., Marine shot himself in the foot, M16A2. **(1 injured)**

**06 MAR** – Okinawa, Japan, Discharge into fellow Marine's leg in the berthing area, M9. **(1 injured)**

**06 MAR** – Iraq, Negligent discharge of weapon amputated Marine's finger. Marine thought weapon was in Condition IV, M9. **(1 injured)**

**05 APR** – Iraq, Marine climbing into 7-ton truck and weapon was discharged, shooting him in the foot, M9, **(1 injured)**

**16 APR** – Iraq, Discharge in the cab of vehicle resulted in metal fragments being lodged in the neck of the driver. **(1 injured)**

**28 APR** – Iraq, Marine supposedly cleared weapon, then discharged one round into lower leg, M9. **(1 injured)**

**05 MAY** – Iraq, Marine shot himself in the foot trying to clear an Iraqi pistol. **(1 injured)**

**06 MAY** - Camp Lejeune, N.C., Marine was instructing another Marine in the armory and discharged pistol into left hand, M9. **(1 injured)**

**08 JUN** - Okinawa, Japan, Guard en route to gate to conduct turnover; while the vehicle was in motion, Marines were horse-playing, and one round discharged and entered another Marine's head, M9. **(1 fatality)**

**15 JUN** - Iraq, Marine struck by negligent discharge in abdomen, M16A2. **(1 fatality)**

**07 JUL** – Iraq, Sailor received fatal gunshot to the head due to negligent discharge from two Marines' horseplay, M9. **(1 fatality)**

## Reported Fiscal Year 04 Negligent Discharges

**24 DEC** – Pax River, Md., A Marine negligently discharged his weapon prior to guard change over, M9. **(no injuries)**

**28 JAN** – Japan, Negligent discharge of weapon by guard, M9. **(no injuries)**

**12 MAR** – Iraq, A Marine discharged a heavy machine-gun while conducting security

operations for CPA HQ, M2. **(no injuries, civilian vehicle damaged)**

**13 APR** – Iraq, A Marine had a negligent discharge that hit fellow Marine in the abdomen, M9. **(1 injured)**

**23 APR** – Camp Lejeune, N.C., Marine participating in Marine Corps rifle and pistol match shot his finger, .45 cal. **(1 injured)**

**25 APR** – Bahrain, Two Marines preparing a vehicle for patrol checked chamber to make sure machinegun was clear, sent bolt home, and one round discharged, M240G. **(no injuries, near-miss)**

**5 MAY** – Afghanistan, Marine had a negligent discharge while sleeping with weapon in his sleeping bag. Round impacted left foot, M16A2. **(1 injured)**

**20 MAY** – Norfolk, Va., Marine conducting advanced urban combat training with platoon fired two rounds into deck, M16A2. **(near-miss)**

**12 JUN** – Afghanistan, while cleaning weapon, Marine had a negligent discharge that shot Marine sitting next to him. Round struck left ring finger, left scrotum, and lodged in left thigh, M9. **(1 injured)**

**20 JUN** – Afghanistan, While attempting to holster weapon, Marine let slide release forward, fatally shooting fellow Marine in the head across from him in the tent, M9. **(1 fatality)**

**25 JUN** – Washington, D.C., Marine was injured by self-inflicted negligent discharge to right foot, service shotgun. **(1 injured)**

**3 AUG** – Iraq, Marine died as a result of self-inflicted negligent discharge to abdomen, M9. **(1 fatality)**

**6 AUG** – Camp Lejeune, N.C., Marine went to clear his weapon and drew his pistol from the holster, visually cleared weapon by

inspecting chamber with slide only pulled back three-quarters to the rear. Marine then pointed weapon at the deck and pulled trigger, negligently discharging, .45 cal. **(near-miss)**

**16 AUG** – Norfolk, Va., Marine was conducting close quarters battle (CQB) training and discharged one round into the wall, with no target in site, M16A2. **(near-miss) GW**



Above: Common sense is an uncommon virtue; don't place clearing barrels facing each other. Left: Entry and exit wounds from a negligent discharge, resulting in severe and permanent nerve damage.